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ABSTRACT

This consensus statement was the result of a conference on school-to-work transition for youths with disabilities which brought together service providers, consumers, family members, researchers, and others. Consensus was reached on several principles, organized around six broad areas: (1) what school-to-work transition for this population is and whom it is successfully serving; (2) essential components of a comprehensive school-to-work transition process for youth with disabilities; (3) roles and responsibilities of youth, families, educators, social service personnel, vocational rehabilitation specialists, employers, and others in the school-to-work transition process; (4) critical relationships among individuals and organizations in the school-to-work transition process; (5) public and private policies which facilitate successful implementation of school-to-work transition of youth with disabilities; and (6) needed research for expanding and improving school-to-work transition. (DB)

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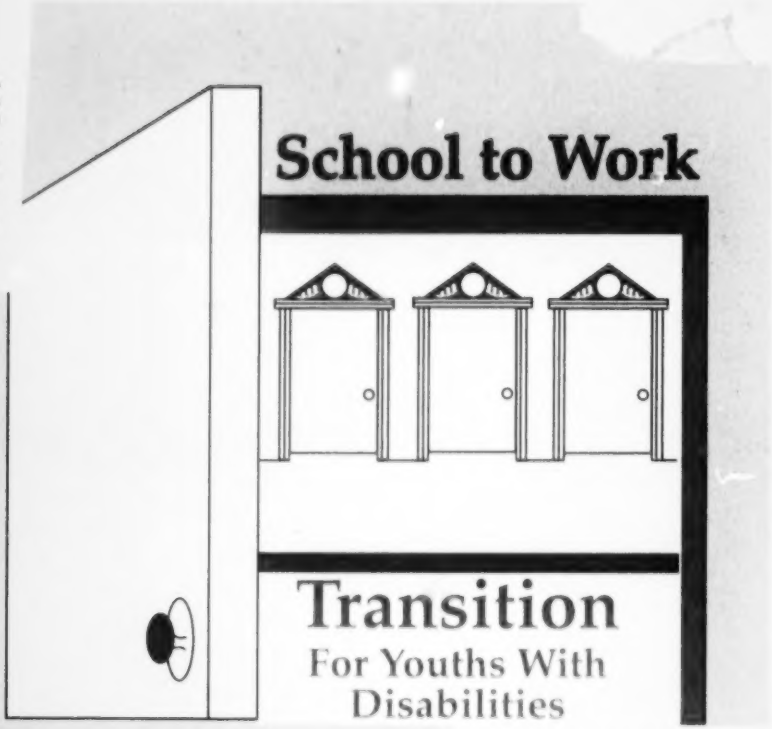

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CONSENSUS STATEMENT

National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research
January 24-26, 1994

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Volume 1, Number 6

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The National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) Consensus Validation Conferences are convened to evaluate and synthesize available scientific information and to improve the dissemination of findings from rehabilitation research. It is anticipated that practices discussed in this statement will be adopted by practitioners and consumers.

NIDRR Consensus Statements are prepared by a nonfederal 10-member panel, based on (1) resource papers prepared by experts; (2) testimony presented by researchers, clinicians, and consumers during a one-day public hearing; and (3) a day of closed deliberations by the panel during which the consensus statements are prepared. This statement is an independent report of the panel and is not a policy statement of NIDRR or the federal government.

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Abstract

A recent study indicates that 43 percent of youth with disabilities remain unemployed 3 to 5 years following high school, 36 percent drop out of school before receiving a diploma or certificate, and fewer than 17 percent gain access to postsecondary vocational or educational programs. These findings indicate the need to identify what constitutes the best practices in transition and the barriers to successful implementation of those practices.

"School-to-Work Transition for Youths With Disabilities," the sixth Consensus Conference sponsored by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR), brought together a variety of disciplines in the field of school to work transition to arrive at consensus on the best practices for helping disabled youths gain employment. This statement, a product of the Consensus Conference, is a part of NIDRR's ongoing commitment to synthesize available scientific information that can improve the services offered to people with disabilities.

The Conference's Advisory Board and 10-member expert panel, which included consumers, commissioned a series of papers summarizing research in the field and listended to a full day of testimony from providers, consumers, family members, researchers, and others in order to determine the current knowledge in the field.

The panel deliberated on questions that define school-to-work transition and identified who it is successfully serving. Consensus was reached on the essential components of a comprehensive school-to-work transition process for youth with disabilities and the role and responsibilities of all the parties involved in school-to-work transition, including the youths, were determined. Public and private policies that facilitate successful implementation of school-to-work transition for youth with disabilities were identified.

Although a wide array of information, innovation, and best practices were identified at the conference, there remains a substantial number of research questions that await answers. This consensus statement and its identification of future research issues can move the field forward quickly and effectively to meet the needs of youths who are ready to transition to the work world.

Introduction

Slightly more than a decade has passed since the federal government made school-to-work transition for youth with disabilities a major education priority. Over that brief time span, several legislative initiatives have mandated educational preparation, planning, and interagency cooperation designed to enhance the employment prospects and adult life circumstances of these youth. These initiatives, along with evolving transition practices, have resulted in greater emphasis on postsecondary outcomes. Changes in curriculum, interagency collaboration, and funding mechanisms have been made or are being considered as a result of this emphasis. Consequently, the 250,000 youth who exit school each year now face improved prospects for meaningful postschool employment and adult life.

These improved prospects are possible when school, human service organizations, community entities, government, and employers work together with students and their families to prepare and plan for school-to-work transition. However, there is still a long way to go. A recent study indicates that 43 percent of youth with disabilities remain unemployed 3 to 5 years following high school, 36 percent drop out of school before receiving a diploma or certificate, and fewer than 17 percent gain access to postsecondary vocational or educational programs. These findings mean, among other things, that there is still more to be known about what constitute the best practices in transition and what the barriers are to successful implementation of those practices.

A close examination of the current state of school-to-work transition for youth with disabilities is now warranted, given the history of legislative mandates, rapidly evolving transition methodology, and need to achieve better postschool outcomes. To accomplish this, the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) brought together the expertise of consumers, practitioners, researchers, family members, and analysts to arrive at consensus on the present status of and best practices in school-to-work transition for youth with disabilities.

A ten-member panel heard evidence and testimony presented at the conference, read background papers specially prepared by experts in

the field, and drew from their own expertise to formulate a Consensus Statement on the following six questions:

1. What is school-to-work transition for youth with disabilities and whom is it successfully serving?

2. What are the essential components of a comprehensive school-to-work transition process for youth with disabilities?

3. What roles and responsibilities among youth, family, educators, social service personnel, vocational rehabilitation specialists, employers, and others have been shown to facilitate successful school-to-work transition for youth with disabilities?

4. What relationships among individuals and organizations have been shown to be crucial to successful school-to-work transition for youth with disabilities?

5. What public and private policies facilitate successful implementation of school-to-work transition for youth with disabilities?

6. What future research is needed for expanding and improving school-to-work transition for youth with disabilities?

What is School-to-Work Transition for Youth With Disabilities and Whom is it Successfully Serving?

According to the 1990 Amendments of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (P.L. 101-476) *transition services* are defined as:

> a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including post secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. The coordinated set of

> activities shall be based upon the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests, and shall include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

This definition differs significantly from the earlier definition provided by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) in 1984 that emphasized employment as the primary outcome of the transition process. The broader focus of transition is also reflected in other legislation. However, there is no single accepted definition for school-to-work transition. Another area in which consensus is lacking is the age span included in the transition process. Evidence indicates the importance of early experiences in transition and supports increasing the range of the targeted service population to include youth by age 14 or younger as appropriate, with preparation beginning in elementary grades, through age 25 in order to address high dropout rates and the need for follow-along services.

Such lack of consensus on the definition of transition makes it difficult to measure who is being successfully served. However, based on recent research, certain information is known. It is important to note that the students who were a part of this research may or may not have received transition services because services were not mandated at the time these students were in special education. Among youth who had been out of school less than 2 years, males were more likely to be employed than females and white males were more likely to be employed than minority males. High school graduates were more likely than either "age-outs" or dropouts to be competitively employed. Rates of employment for youth with learning disabilities or speech impairments and the general population of youth—all of whom had been out of school 3 to 5 years—were virtually the same. Youth in other disability categories were less likely to be employed, most notably youth who are mentally retarded, orthopedically impaired, deaf/blind, or multiply disabled.

Males gained more than females in the rate of employment 3 to 5 years after secondary school. Hispanics and whites experienced the

labor market similarly in the early postschool years; however, the rate of employment for whites increased over time, whereas for Hispanics it did not. Youth with disabilities who completed high school were more likely to become employed over time than either those who dropped out or aged out.

Youth with disabilities were often employed at poverty-level wages initially, but these wages were comparable for noncollege youth of similar ages in the general population. This similarity calls for the examination of increases in wages for youth with disabilities over time. As these youth continued to work, wage advancement was pronounced. Three to five years out of school, the percentage of employed youth who were earning low wages dropped sharply, while the proportion who earned more than $6.00 per hour increased fourfold. Although all disability groups realized wage increases, the initial wage disparity between disability categories that was apparent in the early years after secondary school persisted. For example, youth with mental retardation or orthopedic impairments, who were among those with the lowest median wages initially, were much less likely than those in most other groups to increase their wages.

Males, compared with females, were significantly higher wage earners 3 to 5 years after secondary school, and whites were significantly more likely to be high-wage earners compared with African Americans. Both high school graduates and dropouts showed strong increases in wages over time, whereas youth who had aged out did not. Also, it appears that graduates may, over time, show benefits of their education as they continue to earn increasingly higher wages.

In terms of postsecondary education, youth with disabilities were significantly less likely than youth in general to have attended postsecondary schools. However, it appears that many youth with disabilities may delay postsecondary education.

White males with learning disabilities, mental retardation, or speech impairments seem to be making the most successful school-to-work transitions. They are the most likely to become employed over time. Transition appears to be most successful for students who receive vocational education and early work experiences, because they are more likely to be employed after school completion. A series of related vocational education classes is associated with significantly higher wages and higher rates of employment. Secondary students

who participate in academic general education programs appear to be linked to postsecondary academic placements. Students who participate in general education classes also seem to have higher probabilities for postsecondary placements, employment, and higher wages. The presence of a transition goal for either postsecondary academics or vocational training is positively related to achieving that goal after secondary school.

What Are the Essential Components of a Comprehensive School-to-Work Transition Process for Youth With Disabilities?

Components refers to ideas, processes, procedures, and personnel basic to a comprehensive transition process that will provide excellent, not minimal, services. It is believed that transition to work is most successful when it is part of a process of transition to community and independent living. The following components may prove more or less important in the short run, but each is necessary for most students in the long run. The components are interactive, multidimensional, and change over time. Accountability must be built in to assure service systems that the components function for the benefit of students.

Essential components of a comprehensive school-to-work transition process are delineated below, not in order of importance:

1. Federally mandated Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) with identified transition services are based on student involvement and decision making, together with that of the family, through a process that challenges students to reach their highest potential.

   IEPs include postschool goals prior to the actual development of Individualized Transition Plans (ITPs). The identification of transition services begins by 14 years of age or 2 years prior to leaving school. IEPs focus on independent living and employment needs and provide:

   - assessment of individual student abilities, goals, and needs, focused on information relating to outcomes of working and living in the community;
   - long-term goals and short-term objectives;

- strategies for accessing independent living and employment services;
- timelines for integrating services; and
- cooperative agreements among providers for offering services to youth.

2. Databases of current information are used, which detail:

   - the nature, needs, interests, and preferences of students; and
   - services and employment opportunities available in the community.

   Information collected from educational learning and development is available to adult service providers prior to entry. This permits the aggregation of individual information to be used for individualized program planning, systemwide evaluation, and for program development and evaluation.

3. Active family involvement is necessary in order to set goals and directions, support students' efforts, and assure compliance with legal and regulatory expectations. This component uses available support groups, networks, and other empowering options, including self-help materials provided to families.

4. Skills training for youth, with emphases beyond those typical of academic programs, may include:

   - motivation, self-determination, and decisionmaking;
   - nontraditional jobs that are nonstereotypical as to disability or gender;
   - specific salable vocational skills;
   - job seeking skills;
   - job-related work habits; and
   - job-related social skills.

5. Interagency agreements are focused on cooperation, funding streams, and collaboration. These are used to:

   - coordinate information used by agencies for required

individualized plans, thus avoiding duplication of services and efforts;
- determine which agencies fund which services for which students; and
- assure seamless movement among services for all youth regardless of nature of disability.

These interagency agreements:

- provide a single point of entry into adult services;
- coordinate accurate, up-to-date information about services and options; and
- document and aggregate data regarding needs of transitioning youth.

Furthermore, these agreements identify local, state, and federal interagency coalitions of schools; businesses; adult providers; economic development agencies; health, social service, and rehabilitation agencies; postsecondary institutions; and stakeholders. These interagency groups collaborate to:

- assess transition requirements of youth (e.g., for early intervention, literacy, adult services, career awareness);
- develop strategies, funding/resources, and agreements for meeting their needs;
- monitor the nature and quality of services;
- coordinate information relative to curriculum development and work experience, using an active employer council;
- develop and implement policies; and
- assure an array of community options for individuals to move among as they mature, including opportunities for participation in cocurricular and extracurricular activities.

6. Service/career coordination services are used to:

- link young adults and families with required services, including postsecondary education options;
- help assure that services are accessed and used; and
- provide advocacy as required.

7. Knowledge of laws and regulations related to transition (e.g., Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Rehabilitation Act) must be provided to all people involved in the transition process.

8. Career exploration and work experience are core elements of transition, including:

   - paid, supervised summer employment in the community between the junior and senior years and work experiences during school years;
   - shadowing and other career development opportunities;
   - part-time jobs outside of high school;
   - direct contacts with postsecondary education institutions; and
   - interaction with role models who have similar disabilities.

9. Ongoing follow-along and follow-up of youth leaving school is used to:

   - assure that transition services are conducted effectively;
   - guide evolution of services to meet changing needs in the community; and
   - identify and re-refer students who require additional services after exiting the schools.

10. Availability of specialized expertise that will assure the transition of all youth with disabilities includes:

    - access to specialized equipment, procedures, and methodology;
    - consultation from practitioners and professionals with specialized areas of expertise; and
    - assurance of mentoring and the availability of role models.

11. Personnel preparation programs:

    - assure a base level of competence relative to each profession's standards;

- offer opportunities to develop additional skills and knowledge, including collaboration; and
- assure utilization of national databases of research findings and best practices.

12. Processes and procedures that assure provision of the assistive technology, learning aides, and environmental controls or modifications needed by transitioning youth:

    - are based upon assessments from experience and activities during the later school years;
    - insure carry-over or transfer from school to the post-secondary environment;
    - assure there is no delay between leaving school and moving into work or postsecondary activities; and
    - include the use of memoranda of understanding regarding ownership and transfer of devices.

What Roles and Responsibilities Among Youth, Family, Educators, Social Service Personnel, Vocational Rehabilitation Specialists, Employers, and Others Have Been Shown to Facilitate Successful School-to-Work Transition for Youth With Disabilities?

It has only been since 1990 that transition planning was added as a critical activity under IDEA. Therefore, there is little empirical evidence yet available that shows how the roles and responsibilities of various parties facilitate successful school-to-work transition. Also, much of what is known has focused on transition as a process rather than on work as an outcome. However, through the literature available to date, it is possible to identify key activities that parties involved in transition perform or facilitate that can have an impact on successful postschool work. These activities are outlined below.

Youth. Ideally, students' efforts are supported by families, educators, and personnel from agencies involved in transition from school to work. Youth best contribute to transition when they:

- have basic understanding of their disability and its impact on work (self-awareness);

- express their interests, fears, and desires (self-advocacy and self-determination);
- participate in community and family activities (social skills);
- get involved early in the "process";
- have role models with whom to identify; and
- know their rights.

Families. Families have changed over the years, as single families or blended families have become as prevalent as traditional nuclear families. The term *family* now includes significant adults in students' lives. Identification and involvement of the significant adults are essential to successful transition. A key role of family is to teach and encourage students in advocacy, independence, and decision making. Families best contribute to transition when they:

- understand rights,
- are familiar with transition services,
- encourage integrating students into family life,
- encourage community participation,
- plan for transition at an early age,
- familiarize themselves with agencies that can benefit students well in advance of need, and
- evaluate student progress.

Educators. There are many different ways in which educators influence the transition process. There are different levels of impact as well. Key educator roles are listed here.

Education administrators contribute to the transition process when they ensure compliance with the basic tenets of special education law, such as IDEA and other relevant legislation.

Local education agencies contribute to the transition process when they:

- develop relevant cooperative interagency agreements or memorandums of understanding with key players, including the identification of a key local transition specialist. (In a recent national study, it was found that 92 percent of the state-level transition coordinators surveyed reported transition specialist roles at the local level.);

- establish local transition councils to identify issues and develop resources to address them; and
- include parents in professional development programs.

Special educators or transition specialists contribute to the transition process when they:

- provide direct services (including job placement and development);
- engage in collaborative activities, such as coordinating referrals among agencies;
- help develop/monitor Individualized Transition Plans;
- are sensitive to family and students' individual and cultural needs;
- provide ongoing communication to evaluate the process frequently and are flexible if changes arise during transition;
- assist students in developing appropriate interpersonal and social skills;
- promote independence and encourage participation in community activities; and
- promote outreach to appropriate service providers who can meet student needs.

Postsecondary educators. Institutions of higher education have been required to meet access mandates since the passage of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and they are required to meet access mandates under the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA-PL-101-336). Colleges and universities are becoming accessible in greater numbers, but barriers still exist on many campuses. Post-secondary education personnel must network with and disseminate information to secondary educators, parents, and prospective students to realistically frame expectations for the rigors of postsecondary experience. Activities of post-secondary educators include:

- providing linkages to high schools through outreach efforts;
- informing secondary school personnel of prerequisites for transition to postsecondary education;
- disseminating information about college preparation and expectations associated with postsecondary settings;
- offering orientation programs to students with disabilities who elect to attend given institutions;

- teaching and reinforcing advocacy skills;
- advocating with and on behalf of students, when necessary, to ensure that their rights are safeguarded under the laws; and
- providing reasonable accommodations.

Rehabilitation Specialists. Vocational rehabilitation services can be a key complement to the support, training, and employment process for students with disabilities. Rehabilitation specialists contribute to transition when:

- services are planned in a timely manner;
- they have top level administrative support; and
- they support interagency collaboration and cross training.

For eligible students, the rehabilitation specialist may provide any or all of the following services:

- guidance and counseling;
- vocational evaluation;
- physical and mental health and medical services;
- vocational training;
- financial maintenance;
- transportation;
- family services;
- interpreter or reader services;
- telecommunications aids and devices;
- job placement, including supported employment;
- postemployment services;
- necessary occupational licenses ;
- assistive technology;
- independent living; and
- other services that can be reasonably expected to assist individuals with disabilities in obtaining employment.

Social Services/Adult Services. Successful transition often involves referring students to social service providers and nonprofit adult services. These programs and services contribute to transition when they:

- educate youth and families on what services are available;
- are sensitive to cross-cultural needs and issues; and
- participate as early in the process as possible.

Employers. Since the passage of the Americans With Disabilities Act, employers are becoming more sensitized to the contributions that people with disabilities can make to the workforce. In addition, such legislation as the School to Work Opportunities Act signifies the larger role employers can and want to play in transition. Employers contribute to transition when they:

- serve on advisory councils;
- recommend preparatory curriculum that leads to acquisition of work skills;
- provide career exploration opportunities and work experience; and
- provide paid work experiences.

Future research is needed to determine and evaluate the involvement and effectiveness of these and other parties in transition from school to work for students with disabilities.

What Relationships Among Individuals and Organizations Have Been Shown to be Crucial to Successful School-to-Work Transition for Youth With Disabilities?

Numerous relationships among individuals and organizations are crucial for successful school-to-work transition for youth with disabilities. These relationships are critical for sharing information, developing and implementing plans for individuals and for service systems, and for problem solving. They provide avenues for input by individuals and organizations and offer benefits to those involved. For example, a relationship between the business community and the school system can result in a curriculum relevant to work preparation and a well-prepared pool of potential employees.

Relationships are formed to be responsive to individuals' needs or the needs of a program. Needs will dictate that the intersection of relationships will change over time and the only constants in a network of relationships are the student and the parents. Effective relationships occur between and within agencies or organizations. For example, it is vital in secondary education for general educators and special educators to have shared visions and accountability for students with disabilities. Similarly, it is important for staff from education to work effectively with rehabilitation personnel.

School-to-work transition is most successful when relationships are formed among the following individuals and organizations:

- youth and family or significant adults;
- education personnel, including—
  general educators
  special educators
  vocational educators
  guidance counselors
  related service providers
  administrators
  transition service providers;
- postsecondary educators;
- youth/adult service providers;
- employers;
- researchers;
- funding agencies;
- community resources/organizations (e.g. advocacy organizations, community rehabilitation programs, support groups, mentors/role models, economic and community development agencies);
- personnel preparation programs; and
- health care professionals.

A review of programs and literature indicates that successful transition services are built on relationships that:

- promote empowerment of youth and family;
- share a vision that students with disabilities can and should be employed;
- operate under a philosophy and policies that include strategies to remove attitudinal barriers and "turfisms";
- develop timelines/schedules for key players at each stage of the transition process that are individualized to the needs of the student;
- share leadership/managerial responsibilities;
- share decision-making responsibilities;
- commit to fulfillment of tasks and responsibilities created through formal and informal agreements or plans;
- provide for "seamless," student-centered transition planning;
- acknowledge the need for flexibility or change in the transition plan;

- form an interdisciplinary team where each member is valued and each contribution is considered; and
- agree upon a framework for measuring success, both programmatically and individually.

Crucial to successful transition are cooperative relationships among individuals and organizations. Successful relationships are based on:

- information exchange;
- joint planning;
- follow-up and evaluations;
- restructure of services, if necessary;
- identification of alternative funding sources; and
- focus on the individual needs of youth with disabilities.

What Public and Private Policies Facilitate Successful Implementation of School-to-Work Transition for Youth With Disabilities?

While free and appropriate education for all children and youth with disabilities was mandated in 1975, transition from school to work was not made a priority until 1984. Since then, policy and practice evolved rapidly, so that barely 10 years later there is a wealth of information about transition approaches. Because of the emphasis on work outcomes, much of this information was related to employment. Demonstrations of state-of-the-art practices, creative local implementations of transition models, and research have all contributed to this knowledge and to the formulation of new federal legislation and policies.

Previous sections have described the best practices, roles, and responsibilities that promote successful implementation of school-to-work transition for youth with disabilities. Several important policies, including legislative acts, have supported the development of these practices. Key pieces of legislation have recently been enacted that affect the services provided to these youth and the opportunities available to them. These include policies related specifically to people with disabilities as well as policies and practices addressing employment, community access, and participation in all life areas for all individuals.

Interrelationships of Legislation. Recent legislative actions that most directly affect transition from school to work for youth with disabilities include:

- the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, which mandates appropriate education in the least restrictive environment and the development of transition plans for youth with disabilities at age 16, or at age 14 and younger, if appropriate;
- the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1993, which require the development of rehabilitation plans *prior* to school exit; and
- the Americans With Disabilities Act, which prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities and guarantees access to public and private services.

Broader legislation that affects school-to-work transition for youth with disabilities includes:

- the Carl Perkins Act, which requires that vocational education programs be accessible to youth with disabilities;
- the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), which provides employment and training services for persons with barriers to employment, including individuals with disabilities; and
- the School to Work Opportunity Act[1], which prepares young people, including those with disabilities, for careers in high-skill, high-wage jobs through work-based learning and business partnerships.

These laws share many common components and, in some instances, are coordinated to promote maximum benefit. Because successful transition from school to work is influenced by multiple agencies, systems, and disciplines (e.g. education, rehabilitation, other human services), it is important that the policies affecting these systems are coordinated. Ways in which these laws work together to promote successful school-to-work transition for youth with disabilities are illustrated below:

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[1] As of the writing of this Consensus Statement, the School to Work Opportunity Act had not yet been passed by Congress. Imminent enactment is expected.

1. Community-based learning and work experience are supported by policies set forth in IDEA, JTPA, the Carl Perkins Act, and the School to Work Opportunity Act. IDEA requires that transition services take into account community-referenced curriculum needs; JTPA provides summer youth employment programs; the Carl Perkins Act promotes cooperative education programs to which students with disabilities have access; and the School to Work Opportunity Act requires work-based learning.

2. Business and employer involvement in transition programs is supported by JTPA, which is governed by Private Industry Councils, and by the School to Work Opportunity Act, which mandates partnerships with employers. Identification of skill requirements, knowledge of locally available occupational opportunities, and the development of employer-based training and paid work experiences are dependent on the active involvement of employers.

3. Participation of students in general education activities with non-disabled peers is promoted by the least restrictive environment provisions of IDEA, by the civil rights provisions of the ADA, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and by the full access/equal opportunity provisions of the JTPA, the Carl Perkins Act, and the School-to-Work Opportunity Act.

4. Interagency collaboration is supported by the final regulations implementing IDEA, the Rehabilitation Act Amendments, and the JTPA re-authorization. Each of these laws has requirements for interagency participation by representatives from their respective community agencies.

Local Policy Implementation and Development. Federal legislation establishes minimum requirements and sets a general tone or spirit that communicates the intent of the laws. Laws are only meaningful when they affect local policies and practices, and impact is only as meaningful as its effectiveness in improving outcomes for youth with disabilities. Impact can occur through voluntary compliance, advocacy, enforcement, and innovation that is influenced by legislative intent.

In addition to federal legislation, there are state and local policies that influence effective school-to-work transition. Effective local and state policies sometimes influence new federal mandates. Some policies are rooted in the principles embodied in legislation and go beyond regulatory compliance to promote implementation of state-of-the-art transition practices. For example:

- the provision of necessary assistive technology and the transfer of technology to postschool environments;
- leadership roles for students in chairing their individualized education and transition planning meetings;
- employer-driven Business Advisory Councils that provide input to curriculum development and job preparation and placement assistance;
- the development of interagency agreements specifying roles and responsibilities and delineating measurable outcomes that can be used as guidelines for collaboration;
- IEP/ITP policies that include attention to whole life needs of students (e.g., daily living and personal/social skills, leisure/recreation and residential needs) that affect employment success and quality-of-life outcomes; and
- early career exploration, work experience, and functional life skill development.

Ideals Driving Policy. Effective policies are rooted in a functional skills model rather than a deficit-driven model and are outcome focused. They have flexibility to provide for individual needs while maintaining firm, high standards of quality and accountability. In the best of transition efforts, policy and practice are clearly derived from two central ideals:

- *all* students, regardless of disability label and intensity of service needs, can contribute to the workplace and participate in their communities;
- personal choice and self-determination guide all decisions made throughout the transition process.

What Future Research is Needed for Expanding and Improving School-to-Work Transition for Youth With Disabilities?

There has been little rigorous research on the effectiveness of specific strategies used to promote the transition from school to work for students with disabilities. There is a need to determine the effectiveness of specific transition practices within a quality-of-life framework. Some researchers provided a set of standards that can be used to help ensure that strategies identified as "best practice" are reliable and valid. The practices are:

- well grounded in theory;
- supported empirically through studies that are internally and externally valid;
- founded on existing literature;
- associated with meaningful outcomes; and
- socially valid.

Quantitative and qualitative methods are useful in addressing important research questions. Quantitative methods are particularly useful for describing trends and identifying broad-based effectiveness of strategies. Qualitative research plays an important role in clarifying research questions and in providing data that cannot be obtained through quantitative studies. Qualitative studies are particularly useful in examining processes associated with transition, identifying successful practices, and identifying the impact of services on individuals.

The following research questions were developed through a review of resource papers written for the conference, testimony provided at the conference, and other information available to the panelists. The list is by no means exhaustive, but is meant to include questions from which pertinent research can evolve.

1. What assistance do employers need to effectively accommodate employees on the job?

2. What are the effects of specific rehabilitation strategies on student choice, motivation, and satisfaction; and how are these variables related to transition outcomes?

3. What are the variables that constitute effective interagency collaboration?

4. What is the impact of specific education service delivery options (e.g., full inclusion, resource room, self-contained) on transition outcomes?

5. What are the dimensions of a conceptual framework that will improve quality of life for youth who transition from school to work?

6. What components of a comprehensive transition process provide the most satisfactory transition outcomes?

7. What are the training needs of transition professionals and paraprofessionals to work with professionals from other disciplines and with families?

8. What impact does early transition preparation have on postschool outcomes?

9. How do culturally relevant curricula influence transition outcomes?

10. What transition planning strategies are effective in decreasing school dropout rates?

11. What is the impact, on a longitudinal basis, of pertinent federal legislation (i.e., IDEA, Rehabilitation Act Amendments, ADA, Carl Perkins Act, Job Training Partnership Act, Wagner O'Day Act, and School to Work Opportunity Act) on local service delivery and student outcomes?

12. What local implementation strategies are most effective in meeting the requirements and intent of pertinent federal legislation (i.e., IDEA, Rehabilitation Act Amendments, ADA, Carl Perkins Act, Job Training Partnership Act, and School to Work Transition Act)?

13. What factors influence employer participation in providing work experience, career exploration, job shadowing, and other collaborative activities?

14. Does the use of vocational education, postsecondary education, and adult services positively affect the ability of youth to meet educational goals that reflect their career interests and abilities?

15. What strategies promote the involvement of families in transition planning?

16. What is the prevalence of youth with disabilities not in special education that would benefit from transition services and what factors influence postsecondary outcomes for these youth?

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